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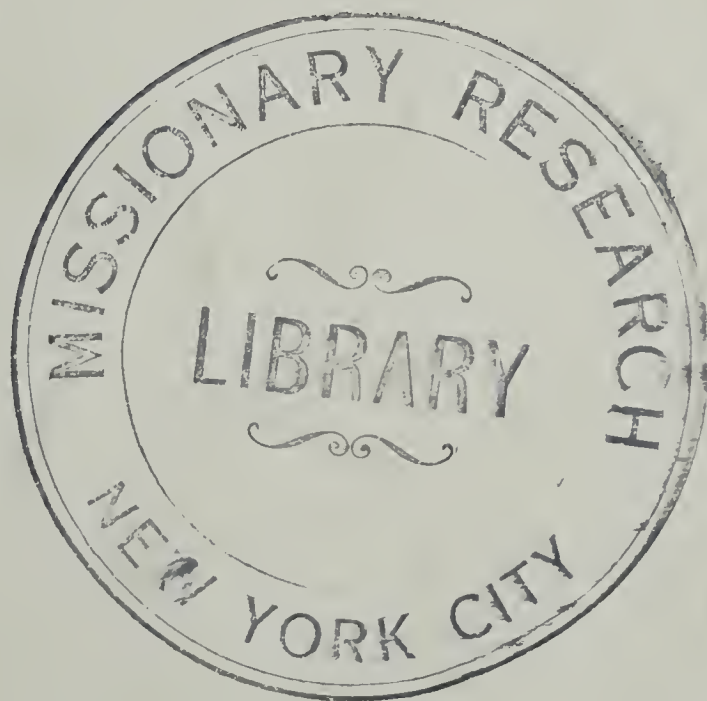
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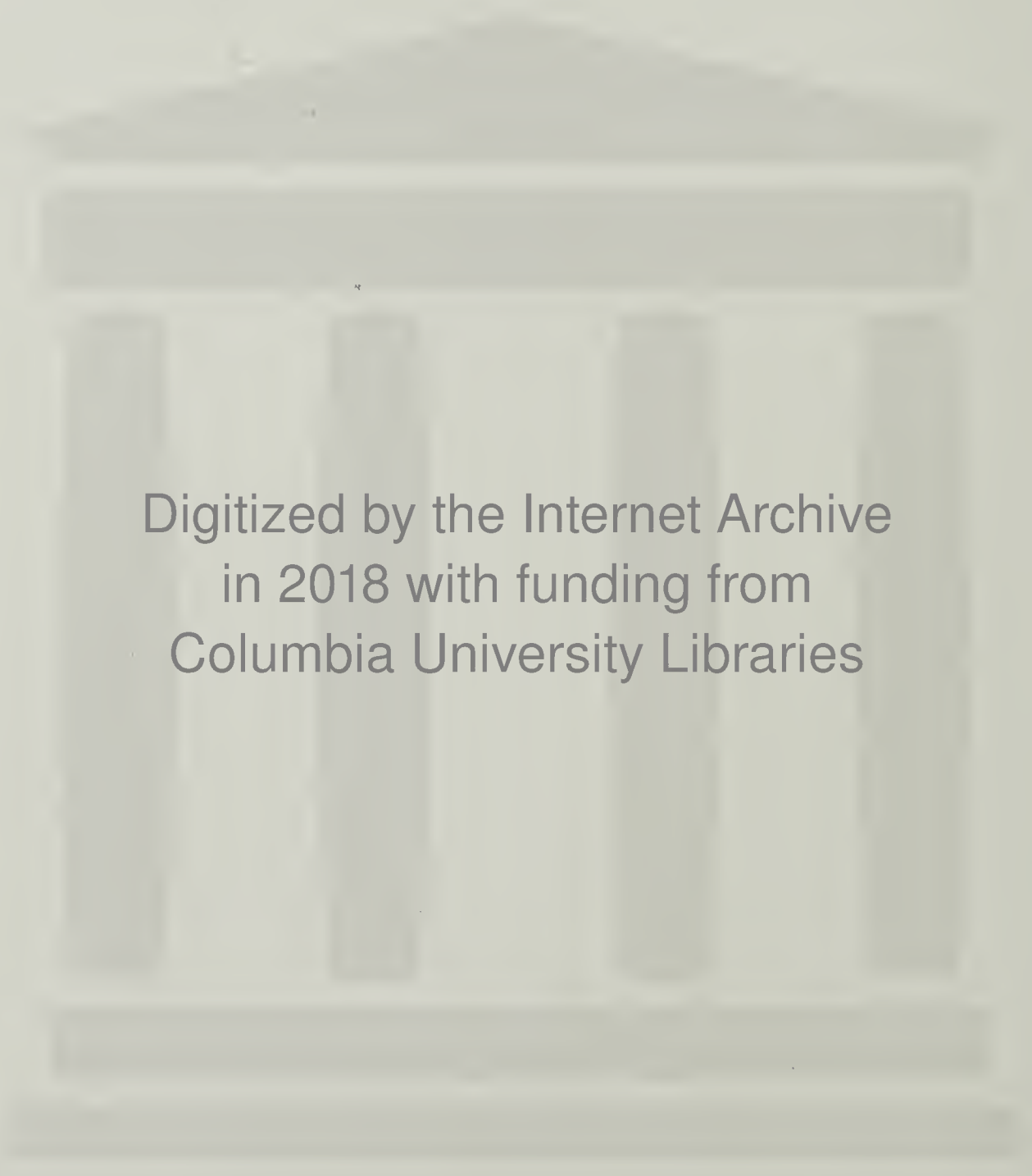
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THE LIBERIAN CRISIS

by
HENRY LITCHFIELD WEST





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MR. HENRY LITCHFIELD WEST

has been for seventeen years president of the American Colonization Society which deeded as a free gift to Liberia in 1847 the territory now occupied by that Republic. He is also president and chairman of the board of trustees of the Booker T. Washington Agricultural and Industrial Institute of Liberia, recently endowed with \$100,000, as well as a member of the Executive Committee of the American Advisory Committee on Education in Liberia. These official connections necessitated his recent journey to Liberia, where he spent five weeks acquiring first hand knowledge of conditions. Mr. West is by profession a newspaper man and for several years was a staff correspondent of the *Washington Post*. He is a member of the famous Gridiron Club of Washington correspondents and is a former president of that organization. In addition he served for nearly ten years as one of the Commissioners of the District of Columbia under Presidents Theodore Roosevelt and Taft. He is also the author of "Federal Power, Its Growth and Necessity," listed in the New York Times as one of the best one hundred books during the year of its publication. He is a frequent contributor to magazines on politics and international affairs and has occupied many positions of honor and responsibility.

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I.

Liberia the Nation's Ward

Just around the south-eastern corner of the big shoulder which bulges out from the west coast of Africa into the Atlantic Ocean lies a strip of territory now in the international limelight.

It is a more or less isolated section of the world known as the Republic of Liberia.

It is a Republic sure enough, with a Constitution modelled almost word for word upon our own immortal document, a president, vice-president, a legislature and all the other whys-and-wherefores that a real republic ought to have. It is unique because it is a black man's government and still further unique because it is the only independent government now existent upon the African continent with the solitary exception of Abyssinia. Perhaps it is for this reason that the European powers which have great holdings in Africa would like to see it pass away. Practically all the other black people in the dark continent are dependent and they are apt to become restless and discontented if much longer held in restraint. If for any reason Liberia should be wiped off the map there would be only one exception to colonies in Africa, a situation most satisfactory to the dominant powers in Africa.

Why should the United States be interested in Liberia? What concern can we possibly have in maintaining the independence and territorial integrity of a miniature Republic on the other side of the Atlantic? Why should the United States government at the present time send to Liberia the Judge Advocate General of the army in the hope that his visit will bring order out of chaos?

The answer to this question is a romantic chapter in American history. It begins more than a century ago, when the increasing number of freed slaves in the United States became a problem. They were not wanted. Their presence was a constant menace to the continuance of slavery. If the stories that have come down to us are true, they were an objectionable element in the

communities where they had located. The Virginia legislature called them "persons obnoxious to the law and dangerous to the peace of the State," and wanted Congress to give the President authority to send them away.

But where could they be sent?

Of course, Africa seemed to be the most appropriate spot. From Africa they had been transported to these shores and back to their original home they ought to go. That was the inception of the idea of colonizing Africa with free negroes and with those slaves who were later granted their liberty. Numerous plantation owners who found slave labor an expensive experiment were willing to get rid of the burden but the laws of Georgia and elsewhere forbade the freed slaves from remaining within the State borders. Consequently it was useless to emancipate the slaves without providing for them a place of refuge, and, to tell the truth, the northern States did not want them. Massachusetts excluded them by law.

Here is where the United States stepped into the picture—became so thoroughly involved, in fact, that it is largely responsible for the final outcome of a negro Republic in Africa. The first men who were sent to spy out the land, to discover some place where the freed slaves could find a permanent home, were agents of the government and sailed in a ship which the government provided. When a location had been selected, the government sent over the first batch of colonists in a ship chartered out of the national funds. More than this, Congress in 1819 appropriated \$100,000 for the support of an agency to receive the colonists "and for the keep and deportation of the liberated negroes."

There is no need to lengthen out the story with a mass of details, interesting though they be, because Secretary of State Knox summed up the facts in a report to President Taft in 1910. "The story of Liberia from its earliest inception to its elevation to independent statehood," he said, "demonstrates its American character throughout. The first foothold on the African coast was through the efforts of American citizens. From 1819 the association of the government with the project is distinct. The colony was a necessary factor in the execution of a federal statute. The vessels of the United States participated in the initial acts of colo-

nization. Negotiations with the inland tribes for the purchase of lands were conducted by officers of the United States," and he added that American war vessels aided the Liberians in their efforts to suppress the slave trade.

Nor was this all. An official report made in 1830 declared that the American government had for many years employed its resources to colonize recaptured Africans, build them homes, purchase farming implements for them, buy ships for their conveyance, pay their teachers, supply them with arms and ammunition, enlist troops to guard them and even employ the army and navy in their defense.

If that does not tie up the United States with Liberia in a common bond there is no such thing in the world as convincing evidence.

The interest of the United States in Liberia did not end with these manifestations of material aid. After the American Colonization Society had deeded to the Liberians every foot of the territory acquired by purchase from the native chiefs and had sanctioned the formation of an independent nation so that the colonists might enjoy the rights and privileges of self-government, the United States not only extended the right hand of fellowship to the new Republic but promised it the strong arm of protection. Secretary Upshur formally notified Great Britain along about 1843 that the United States government "would be very unwilling to see it (Liberia) despoiled of its territory rightfully acquired, or improperly restrained in the exercise of its necessary rights and powers as an independent settlement." Secretary Bayard asserted that the United States, as the next friend of Liberia, had the right to aid her in preventing any encroachment by foreign powers. Many similar quotations could be given from the official records but Secretary Root stated the case in a nutshell. "Liberia," he said, "is the nation's ward."

With all this background of history in my mind, it was no wonder that I felt a thrill as for the first time I stepped upon Liberian soil and had pointed to me the spot where the first colonists had landed. I recalled with no little pride the assistance which my government had given to these seekers after liberty when they were struggling against disease and hostile natives. The realization

that the dream of a century ago had become a reality was something to stir the heart.

But how did the United States still further demonstrate its interest in its ward far over the seas?

In 1908 the troubles in Liberia, both internal and with the government of Great Britain, reached such an acute phase that the Liberian government sent a special commission to this country "to ask for assistance in maintaining the independence of the Republic and enable it to carry on a peaceful, orderly and efficient government." This led Congress, upon the recommendation of President Taft and the Secretary of State, to authorize in 1909 the appointment of a Commission to visit Liberia upon an American cruiser and investigate the interests of the United States and its citizens in the Republic of Liberia. In transmitting the report of the Commission to Congress in 1910 President Taft declared that "the Liberian Republic was founded through the efforts of the government of the United States and American citizens," and he added that "I trust the policy of the United States toward Liberia will be so shaped as to fulfill our national duty to the Liberian people, who, by the efforts of this government and through the material enterprise of American citizens, were established on the African coast and set on the way to sovereign statehood."

Then again, 1915, when there was an uprising among the Kru tribes on the south-eastern coast, Liberia appealed for help to the United States and suggested that the presence of an American warship would be most helpful. The matter was serious enough to submit to the personal attention of President Wilson and in the archives of the State Department is the following in the President's handwriting:

"I think the Chester ought by all means to be sent. W. W."

So the Chester went and remained for several months in Liberian waters, not only giving moral support by its presence but actually carrying frontier troops to the scene of the trouble. All along the line, therefore, not a single break occurred. Every one agreed that the United States government, aided by philanthropic organizations like the American Colonization Society and similar organizations, was responsible for the founding of Liberia and that in behalf of the Liberian people there was a national duty

to be performed. The report of the Commission appointed by President Taft stressed the necessity of America's active participation in Liberian affairs. It is worth while to emphasize what Secretary Bayard called "the fostering sanction of this government," because if this policy had been pursued to the present day, Liberia would not now be drifting in the rough sea of an international storm.

Former Secretary of State Hughes is authority for the statement that Liberia was induced by the United States to enter the World War upon the side of the Allies. Liberia having up to that time preserved a strict neutrality, a course advised by me when consulted by cable by the then President of the Republic. Liberia entered the war upon our request when it was shown that it was necessary to gain control of the German cable station at Monrovia and to insure to the Allies continued supply of the palm oil required in the manufacture of munitions. Liberia, entirely devoid of military and naval strength, invited disaster by following the United States into the conflict. Her defiance of Germany was like a Scottish terrier barking at a mastiff. In fact, she suffered for her temerity. One morning a German submarine appeared off Monrovia and her commander sent word that unless the French radio station located near the town was dismantled by four o'clock, the town would be bombarded. His demand met with a contemptuous refusal and promptly at four o'clock the firing commenced. The radio station was destroyed, seven Liberians were killed and the town would undoubtedly have been wiped out except for the fact that the booming of the German guns attracted the attention of a British vessel cruising along the coast. Upon the appearance of this British ship the submarine disappeared. Much has been said and may still be said to the discredit of the Liberians but at least they should be given due recognition for the devotion with which they blindly followed the United States into the World War.

The long continuance of the struggle was ruinous to Liberia, for there were no ships to carry her exports and imports, and so the United States promised a loan of \$5,000,000, but through inaction and delay in Congress the money was never provided. Liberia, however, was not neglected for later, with the cooperation and approval of the State Department, the Finance Corporation

of America agreed to loan Liberia \$5,000,000, and up to the present time has advanced approximately one-half of this amount. The United States government assumed responsibility for nominating to the President of Liberia the Financial Advisor to supervise the fiscal affairs of the Republic. Here again was convincing evidence of the helpful concern which the United States has constantly manifested in the welfare of Liberia. The action of the present government of Liberia in repudiating the agreement upon which the loan was made is not a pleasant story, but it belongs to the domain of facts. Thus far it has not been expunged from a black page in Liberia's history.

The question as to why the United States government—and American citizens in general—should be interested in Liberia has been thoroughly and completely answered. It is an interest which has been demonstrated for more than a hundred years and repeatedly admitted by official spokesmen of the highest rank. It has been both sentimental and practical. The United States is bound to preserve the territorial sovereignty of Liberia unless written promises are as unstable as running water, and it is still more incumbent upon our nation to protect the American interests in Liberia which have the endorsement of our government.

But is this the case? Unfortunately, no. The United States has dumped its ward into the lap of the League of Nations at Geneva and the present administration of Liberia has flaunted a flag of defiance at the United States. It is a sad sequel to a long era of friendship. The history and tradition of a century have been set at naught. The consequence is that the existence of the Liberian Republic is now in the balance.

Can Liberia be saved? The representatives of the nations assembled at Geneva have apparently tried to save it. There is a still more vital question. Will Liberia save herself?

II.

American Philanthropy and Industry

Religion, education and industry.

These are the three ties that bind the United States to Liberia, in addition to the historical connection described in the previous chapter.

If you are identified with church work, even in a minor degree, you must necessarily feel deep concern in present conditions in Liberia and in the future of the country. For one hundred years church funds have been generously disbursed for the religious and educational advancement of the Republic. Practically all of the money that has been spent in this direction, and it amounts to many millions of dollars, has been contributed from the United States. Liberia is heavily indebted to America for genuine philanthropic work.

Mission work and Liberia have always gone hand in hand. One of the first persons sent by the United States government in 1819 to spy out the land and find a home for freed slaves was Rev. Samuel John Mills, one of the founders of the American Colonization Society and credited with being the father of foreign missionary enterprise in America. The Methodist church this year celebrates the centenary of the arrival of the first Methodist missionary in Monrovia and the work then inaugurated has never ceased. It is due to this church that the College of West Africa, recently installed in a new concrete building erected at a cost of \$40,000, was established and it is recognized as the leading and most efficient educational institution in Liberia. This is only one of the many contributions which the Methodist church has made to the religious and educational welfare of the Republic.

It is the Protestant Episcopal church, however, which has been unsparing in the expenditure of funds in Liberia. Its work began 97 years ago and has progressed ever since without interruption. With 96 missions, 59 schools teaching 3,022 pupils, 170 native clergy and teachers, 16 American workers and nearly 7,600 baptized Christians, it has developed a great organization requir-

ing the constant supervision of a resident Bishop. Its principal mission at Cape Mount, which I visited for three days, is housed in commodious concrete structures, with a well-equipped industrial department. Altogether its properties are valued at nearly \$150,000 and I have an official statement to the effect that the Episcopal church has spent two million dollars in Liberia in the last twenty years. The total amount expended there aggregates nearly five million dollars.

The Lutheran church has spent an average of \$55,000 a year for the past sixty years and in recent years the total has reached \$60,000 annually. Its mission at Muhlenberg occupies both sides of the St. Paul River, about thirty miles from Monrovia, and its property has been improved by the erection of expensive concrete buildings. My visit to Muhlenberg impressed me greatly with the solidity and permanence of these structures, while the work in the schools is conferring a lasting benefit upon the young citizens of Liberia. In addition, there are Lutheran congregations at numerous places in the hinterland, even as far as 200 miles from the coast, and there are twenty Lutheran schools taught by native Africans. The colored Baptists have a fine mission at Suehn and a hospital in Monrovia. The Catholics and other denominations are also doing laudable work.

Then there is the Holy Cross mission and hospital at Bolahun on the French border where 30,000 patients are treated annually. The chapter of philanthropic work could be indefinitely extended. Nothing could better illustrate, however, the existence of a friendly and helpful American sentiment toward Liberia than the creation of the American Advisory Committee on Education in Liberia, of which Dr. Thos. Jesse Jones, of the Phelps-Stokes Fund, is chairman. This committee is composed of representatives of the Phelps-Stokes Fund, the various Colonization Societies, and of the Episcopal, Methodist, Lutheran, National Colored Baptist and other mission boards. It spends thousands of dollars annually for education in Liberia. Its members are inspired by purely altruistic motives, having no connection with any financial or commercial interests. Finally, without going into further detail, the Booker T. Washington Agricultural and Industrial Institute, of which I am the president and chairman of the board of trustees, has expended \$125,000 in Liberia since 1925 and plans a \$20,000 building pro-

gram this year. For many years the amount of outside money which has poured into Liberia in furtherance of religion and education has averaged a quarter of a million dollars each year.

All this is certainly an impressive demonstration of the generous and unselfish regard for Liberia as manifested by its friends in the United States. No wonder that the scores and hundreds of workers who have devoted themselves to the moral and social advancement of Liberia are distressed by the fear that all their service may go for naught. It is not too much to ask the American government to act as a protector in safeguarding these philanthropic labors, born as they were of love for a country which has always been regarded as an offspring of our own.

There is another important American interest in Liberia which, if allowed to develop, is destined to lift the Republic out of the slough of inaction and unprogressiveness. When the territory which is now Liberia had been settled for one hundred years, during which time, however, nothing had been done by the Liberians in the way of commercial development, an event occurred in England which had an utterly unforeseen effect upon Liberia's future. In 1922, when Great Britain was producing seventy-five per cent of the world's rubber supply and the United States was consuming seventy per cent, Great Britain deliberately threw shackles around the American rubber industry by enacting a law known as the Stevenson act by which the production of rubber under the British flag was restricted to a point where the demand would exceed the supply and thereby create artificially high prices for rubber. This desired and selfish result was reached in emphatic fashion. Shortly before the rubber restriction act went into effect rubber was selling for fourteen cents a pound. It reached its peak at \$1.23 a pound in 1926. Largely dependent upon the British product at British prices, American citizens, during the years the plan was in operation, paid \$1,250,000,000 more for their rubber than they would otherwise have paid if the price had remained the same as before the rubber restriction law was passed. Rubber is now selling at five cents a pound.

The enormous burden thus imposed upon the United States, tremendously increasing the cost of highway transportation, naturally attracted intense interest in Congress and a law was unanimously passed appropriating \$500,000 for an investigation

of the rubber supply of the world. Government agencies, however, inevitably move slowly. Meanwhile, therefore, Harvey S. Firestone of Akron, O., decided to become aggressively active in combatting the British monopoly by an endeavor to develop rubber plantations in some country free from foreign domination and control. This was a task not to be accomplished over night. It took nearly three years of exhaustive investigation to finally determine the best place for Americans to grow their own rubber. In the fall of 1926 a party of Americans, led by Harvey S. Firestone, Jr., landed at Monrovia, were accorded an official welcome by the President's military aide, were carried across the bar in open surf boats, and then they set their feet upon Liberian soil. While the missionaries had travelled to Liberia to preach the gospel these men had come as the heralds of industry. They had enthusiasm, optimism and, above all, American energy and pluck. They came not as conquerors to destroy but as harbingers of a new era of economic development for Liberia. They came to transform an unproductive wilderness into a revenue-producing plantation.

The story of these men and what they have accomplished is one of the most remarkable romances of modern times. They had made a circuit of the globe — Philippines, Malay Peninsula, Sumatra, Java, Borneo, Ceylon, Mexico and Brazil—in order to find a spot where rubber might best be grown by Americans upon a gigantic scale. Certain conditions were essential. The locality must be within 600 miles of the equator, where heat and moisture were properly intermingled, and above all, a soil whereon rubber would thrive. Liberia seemed to be ideal. There were vast areas of virgin jungle which could be transformed into forests of rubber trees; there was an abundance of native labor, unskilled but willing and industrious; two thousand acres planted with rubber trees in 1910 had demonstrated the adaptability of climate and soil, and, furthermore, Liberia was located only a few hundred miles further from the United States than England and 6,000 miles nearer to New York than the rubber lands of the Far East.

There was something above and beyond all these material advantages. Liberia had been settled with the aid of the United States, its Constitution was closely modelled after our own and

its flag was very similar to ours. During all the years of the life of the Republic the American government had extended the ægis of its protection—had, in fact, regarded Liberia as its foster-child. Liberia on her part had preserved her independence, and the native tribes, generally speaking, had been docile and content. With the United States always in the background exercising watchful care over its ward, future security for American investment seemed assured.

Confident that it had made a wise selection of location and relying upon the ties of friendship and tradition which had always existed between Liberia and the United States, the Firestone Company entered into an agreement to lease one million acres for ninety-nine years, paying six cents annually for every acre selected for cultivation. A million acres is fifteen hundred square miles. Here was land enough for the greatest rubber plantation in the world. American courage, enterprise and capital had started the United States on the way to rubber independence.

It is easy to say that ten million rubber trees have already been planted on 55,000 acres of land, but the brief sentence cannot possibly visualize the immense expenditure of time, labor and money required to accomplish this feat.

Did you ever see an African jungle?

For days and weeks and months and even years a force of thousands of natives—at one time there were 18,000 on the daily payroll—fought their way inch by inch through an almost impenetrable mass of tangled vegetation with machetes and axes. When the ground was cleared the fallen vines and trees were allowed to rest until the dry season and then were burned. After this came the planting of young rubber trees and the grafting onto them of buds from the finest latex-producing stock of the Far East.

During all the years that this work was in progress more money was expended in Liberia than for any like period in the country's history. The river Du, which was to be the artery of transportation from the plantation to the coast, a narrow stream winding its way through a wilderness, had to be cleared and made navigable; one hundred miles of road were constructed and they are in excellent condition today, after years of constant use in

wet and dry seasons; comfortable, sanitary and modern-equipped houses were erected; a hospital, which in construction and subsequent maintenance has involved an outlay of \$250,000, was provided. Even a radio station was installed in order that there might be daily communication with the outside world.

A stupendous enterprise, which up to date represents an investment of over \$8,000,000. Away out there in the interior of Liberia the ten million rubber trees are living monuments of American courage and audacity. There was a thrill when I landed at Monrovia in remembering how the original colonists crossed the seas and conquered a home in a foreign land. I had even a greater thrill as I was driven over miles and miles of roads between countless rubber trees—I did not know there were so many rubber trees in the world—in the thought that almost limitless stretches of virgin jungle were attacked by simple weapons held in human hands and made to minister to the wants of the world. Above and beyond this physical accomplishment is the knowledge that the natives who did the work were treated as human beings, were free to come and go as they would, and that when an International Commission inquired into labor conditions in Liberia the Firestone Company was given a clean bill of health.

Hitherto-neglected Liberia was thus given a place in the sun, but this was not the only blessing that was bestowed. The Republic needed money and as previously stated, America came to the rescue with an offer of a loan of \$5,000,000, relying upon the good faith and honesty of the Republic, as expressed in a solemn written agreement, for repayment. Has this faith been realized? On the contrary, instead of gratitude and appreciation for all that has been done and help in time of need, there has come repudiation.

The millions of American capital poured into Liberia are at this moment in serious jeopardy. Everything may be swept away.

But that, as Kipling says, is another story.

III.

Liberia and the League of Nations

A clergyman, enjoying a three-months' vacation, emulated the brave patriots of Concord and Lexington. He fired a shot that was heard around the world.

It was in the spring of 1929. The minister determined to spend his holiday in touring Africa. Incidentally, and with no pre-conceived purpose, he included Liberia in his travels. One day he noticed on board his ship a large number of natives. With an inquisitiveness that would have done credit to a trained newspaper man he began to ask questions. The reply astonished him. He learned that the helpless natives had been captured, dragooned, "shanghaied," or whatever else you may like to call it, and were being transported to the Spanish island of Fernando Po to work as laborers. They were to receive little or nothing—mostly nothing—for their services, but, and herein lay the repellant fact, somebody in Liberia was said to be receiving headmoney for every native captured and shipped.

The clergyman returned to the United States and laid before the presiding Bishop of his church the details of his discovery. This high dignitary, although the matter had nothing to do with missions or missionaries, realized the importance of the disclosure. He suggested that a copy of the report be submitted to the State Department.

In this unusual fashion a world-wide slavery scandal was launched.

Notwithstanding the fact that the American government, as shown in the first article of this series, had always been friendly and more than friendly to Liberia, the time had now arrived when protest was compulsory. Slavery, especially when it was said to exist in a Republic founded by negroes who had once been slaves, was not to be tolerated. Without immediate publicity, the Liberian government was informed in friendly fashion that there had been brought to the attention of the United States government "from several sources, reports bearing reliable evidence of authenticity" that there existed in Liberia an export labor system "hardly

distinguishable from organized slave trade, and that in the enforcement of this system the service of the Liberian Frontier Force, and the services and influence of certain high government officials are constantly and systematically used.”

And then the Liberian government was frankly told that if it continued its evil practices it would be disgraced in the eyes of the civilized world.

The Liberian government said no, it wasn't so. It recorded its “solemn and categorical denial” that any such labor conditions existed and suggested that a competent, impartial and unprejudiced commission should investigate.

Why should the United States be concerned with alleged slavery in Liberia? There was something more to it than a mere humanitarian interest. In 1926 an international anti-slavery conference was held in Brussels at which the United States was represented and was naturally a signatory to the convention ultimately adopted. This gave the American government an entering wedge. Therefore, when Liberia suggested a commission, the proposition was accepted and three persons—one an American, one a Liberian, who happened to be ex-President Arthur Barclay, and a third appointed at Liberia's request by the League of Nations—were named and labored for four months. Its verdict was unanimous. It found that although classic slavery—that is, slave markets and slave dealers—did not exist in Liberia, “slavery as defined by the 1926 anti-slavery convention does exist so far as inter- and intra-tribal domestic slavery” was concerned; that domestic slavery was discouraged by the government; but “that a large proportion of the contract laborers shipped to Fernando Po and French Gabun from the southern counties of Liberia have been recruited under conditions of criminal compulsion scarcely distinguishable from slave raiding and slave trading.” More than this, the commission asserted that Vice-President Yancey and other high officials of the government had been connected with the shipment of natives and had employed the Liberian Frontier Force to intimidate villagers, humiliate and degrade chiefs, and “for the convoying of gangs of captured natives to the coast, there guarding them until the time of shipment.”

The friends of Liberia, and because of long association I

count myself among the number, cannot read this indictment without sincere regret that such things could be, but this is a narrative of fact and I have written down the words just as they appear in the official record. To be sure, the Liberian government declares that it has reformed and that the iniquitous slave trade, for the so-called forced labor was nothing else, is now a thing of the past—that it is all water which has gone over the dam.

Despite this declaration, the United States government remains unconvinced, especially as other reforms which are deemed necessary have not been made. It admits that Liberia has made numerous promises but insists that it has failed to submit definite plans for their execution. Not until it became convinced that these imperatively demanded reforms were to be ignored did the United States publicly arraign the Liberian government before the world for its sins of commission and omission. "Not until there is instituted by the Liberian government a comprehensive system of reforms, loyally and sincerely put into effect," said a press release from the State Department, "it will result in the final alienation of the friendly feelings which the American government and people have entertained for Liberia since its establishment nearly a century ago."

The rupture has come. The United States is not recognizing the present Liberian government and insists that it will not do so until Liberia has completely reformed—socially, administratively, judicially, financially and even in the matter of sanitation.

To circumvent the United States, the Liberian government appealed for assistance directly to the League of Nations, of which it is a member, enjoying all the rights and privileges of an independent power. Then, however, arose another problem. The United States is not a member of the League and yet it was universally recognized that in matters affecting Liberia it could not be ignored. The League cut the Gordian knot by appointing an international committee to deal with the Liberian problem and invited the United States to participate in its proceedings. The Department of State, then with Secretary Stimson at its head, apparently welcoming an opportunity to escape its traditional and rightful obligation to Liberia, accepted the invitation, and agreed to the proposed international cooperation. This acquiescence was based in diplomatic language upon "the social and humanitarian

principles involved and the traditional and friendly interest of the American people in the welfare of Liberia." However, the storm center was now transferred from Washington to Geneva, Liberia was no longer "the nation's ward."

The Council of the League appointed a committee of experts to visit Liberia and make a thorough inquiry into Liberian conditions. These experts made a lengthy report, painting a dark and gloomy picture—a mass of heavy clouds unrelieved by the sunshine of hope. It pointed out that Liberia lacks means of communication; that it presents the paradox of being a Republic of 12,000 citizens and with 1,000,000 subjects; and that the antagonism between the civilized and uncivilized peoples was serious enough "to constitute a grave danger" to Liberia. The lack of even the usual sanitary precautions was emphasized. The financial situation was described as tragic. "She has no budget, no accounts, no money," said the report. Salaries had been passed over for many months, the interest and sinking fund had not been paid, the people were in a state of impoverishment, education was at a standstill, and legal and judicial security were so lacking that foreign capital was repelled instead of being attracted. Altogether, the commission reported, both economically and financially, "Liberia is in imminent danger." The danger point has not been passed. The crisis is greater today than ever before in the history of the Republic.

The Commission presented a plan for the complete reorganization of the Liberian government. That was two years or more ago and since then the wise men of Geneva have been struggling with Liberia's problems. Finally a scheme has been evolved by which a Chief Advisor is to be named by the Council of the League of Nations with the acceptance of the President of Liberia. He is to be responsible to and removable by the League Council. He is to collaborate with the President in the preparation of plans for the proposed reforms, give the benefit of his advice, coordinate the work of the foreign experts and supervise the execution of the scheme of assistance. It is not clear whether he would have sufficient authority to make effective the necessary reforms if opposed by Liberian officials.

A long wrangle preceded the settlement of this question of authority. The Liberian government naturally did not want to abdicate in favor of foreign control, but the United States firmly

and persistently declared that advisorships without absolute authority had proven to be worse than none at all. Also, the United States clamped down the lid. It asserted in a formal document transmitted to the League that it would not countenance any further loan to Liberia by the Finance Corporation until a satisfactory administration, guaranteeing a safe and stable government, had been agreed upon by the Republic. "No reforms, no money," said the United States in direct and emphatic language.

The League plan of assistance, after undergoing numerous revisions, was finally approved as a basis for negotiation in Geneva last September. However, through a series of circumstances to be detailed later, the agreement is not yet in force. This is probably not to be deplored as it would be impossible for European interests to regard Liberia with the same altruistic point of view which has always characterized the attitude of the United States. Thus everything is now up in the air, with conditions more uncertain and unsatisfactory than they were when Pandora's Box was first opened at Geneva when the United States laid its time-honored responsibilities on the shoulders of the League of Nations.

It is said in some of the negro papers in the United States that the Liberian government has a right to be suspicious of Greeks bearing gifts; that there are sinister motives underlying all that has been done with the ostensible purpose of affording aid to the struggling Republic; and that the destruction of the government is the ulterior and ultimate object of those who are apparently holding out a helping hand. There would seem to be ample ground for these suspicions if Liberia is to pass under European control. A purely American plan of assistance would, however, remove these doubts. The United States should certainly not leave Liberia to paddle its own canoe for whether it can navigate a tortuous and dangerous channel by itself is a serious question.

It would be a sad day for the negro race if Liberia should lose its identity and be eliminated from the map of the world. The thirteen millions of negroes in the United States who have had their eyes focused upon Liberia in the hope that their race could demonstrate capacity for self-government, would be seriously discouraged if the experiment should prove a failure after nearly a century of endeavor. Every friend of Liberia hopes that its

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territorial integrity and national sovereignty can be preserved.

But can it be?

The answer is in the affirmative, if Liberia will once again, as it has done so often in the past, turn to the United States for that assistance which is her only salvation.

IV.

Liberia Defies the United States

*"How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is
To have a thankless child."*

The United States and Liberia, once the closest of friends, are now at dagger's point. There is at present no sign of reconciliation.

It seems strange that Liberia, which has everything to gain by continued friendship with the United States, should deliberately sever the ties which for so long have bound the nations together.

The first break came when the United States brought to the attention of the world the slavery conditions in Liberia, which Secretary Stimson regarded as "shocking." Liberia resented this action. It argued without foundation that the United States exploded a world-wide scandal to the everlasting shame of Liberia, and did not quietly warn that country that certain damaging facts had come into the possession of the American government and that it should have requested Liberia in a friendly manner to eradicate the alleged evils, thus acting the role of a kind father to a wayward son. As a matter of fact, I am informed that Liberia, before the report of the Slavery Commission was published, was afforded an opportunity to discount the disclosures by declaring that although forced labor had existed, it had been abolished. The offer was declined and the exposure which followed startled the whole world.

Even then the breach between the two nations, although it had become threatening, might have been healed if Liberia had made and executed definite promises of reform. Its failure to do so led to Secretary Stimson's decision to discontinue diplomatic relations with the Republic. When that action was taken the hitherto narrow rift became a chasm and an anti-American sentiment was displayed by the Liberian administration which continues to the present day.

Up to that time, however, there had been no overt act on the part of Liberia to which the United States could take offense.

This moment has now arrived.

When the Liberian government negotiated the loan of five million dollars from the Finance Corporation of America, it represented that it needed the money not only for the adjustment of its outstanding indebtedness but for the construction of certain public works in the form of roads, bridges and wharves, and the development of harbors and communications; the encouragement and development of agriculture; the creation of a sanitary organization, including the establishment and maintenance of hospitals; construction of schools and the encouragement of education among the peoples of the Republic; the maintenance of the Frontier Force, and the general development of the country.

Here, then, was a program which augured well for the future of Liberia. Money spent along these lines would be a capital investment. It meant permanent improvements absolutely required to place the Republic upon a solid foundation for substantial progress. It proposed a long step forward in the direction of ideal conditions. It was a loan thoroughly unselfish, for Liberia was to be the sole beneficiary.

According to the loan agreement, dated September 1, 1926, "the Government covenants that both principal and interest of the bonds will be paid promptly as they respectively become due." Liberia was to pay all expenses incident to the service of the loan and "as an additional guarantee of the prompt payment of the loan and to ensure the efficient organization and functioning of the Liberian fiscal service" it was agreed that the President of the United States should designate a Financial Advisor, the appointment being subject to the approval of the President of Liberia, but this Advisor could not be removed except upon request of the President of the United States. Provision was also made for a Supervisor of Customs, a Supervisor of Internal Revenue, and bonded auditors to handle the finances of the Republic. They were to be removable only for cause.

The whole project was buttressed by numerous safeguards, including the creation of a budget. The latter was to guarantee that the expenses should not exceed the revenues, and it was expressly declared that "no sum shall be disbursed in amounts greater than those provided for in the budget." The government funds

were to be deposited in a bank approved by the Fiscal Agent, the institution finally selected being the United States Trading Company which succeeded the Bank of British West Africa when the latter withdrew from Monrovia.

Nearly two years ago the Liberian government began to default the payment of the principal and interest and was still in default when the principles of an uncompleted plan of assistance were evolved by the League of Nations in Geneva last September. Further progress toward the realization of the plan was made to depend upon the outcome of negotiations for financial assistance between the Liberian government and the Finance Corporation of America. Accordingly the vice-president of the Corporation went to Monrovia in November.

Then out of the clear sky came a crash like thunder.

Almost immediately after the arrival of this official in Monrovia, the legislature of Liberia adopted a remarkable joint resolution which the President promptly approved. It provided for the suspension of payments of interest and principal of the loan from June 30, 1932, until such time as the Liberian revenues shall have amounted to \$650,000 annually for two consecutive years, the present revenue being approximately \$400,000; for the reduction of personnel and salaries of fiscal officials; and absolutely disregarding all priorities stipulated in the loan agreement.

This drastic, violent and unexpected action was at once cabled to the State Department, where it created a sensation. A vigorous protest was at once forwarded to Monrovia, asserting that "the American government viewed with very deep concern the action of Liberia leading to repudiation," and pointing out that an agreement could not be legally changed or modified unless by both parties thereto. Further than this, Liberia was informed that the United States would protest against any financial assistance to Liberia from any source whatever unless the prior rights of American citizens were met in full or modified on a basis of mutual consent. The message was sent to Minister Mitchell in Monrovia for presentation to President Barclay. A reply was received, not from Mr. Barclay but from his secretary, which, according to the State Department, was "so discourteous" that it

was returned. When Minister Mitchell attempted later to communicate with President Barclay his letter was sent back to him unopened.

Was the Liberian government disturbed by this action of the United States? Not at all. On the contrary, it began a series of defiant acts.

The Supervisor of Internal Revenue was summarily removed and advised to leave the country on a certain boat at a certain date. An effort was made to force the American Financial Advisor to agree to comply with illegal acts by threatening his dismissal. The Supervisor of Internal Revenue was dispossessed of his books and papers. The funds of the government were no longer placed with the officially designated depository but were diverted to a private business firm on the water front. All these acts were in direct violation of the terms of the loan agreement and were persisted in notwithstanding protests from the parties concerned. Liberia had taken the bit in her teeth and was running headstrong.

Then the American government unfortunately having involved itself with the League of Nations and having compromised to some extent its former policy of direct action concerning Liberia, made an appeal to the international committee of the League at Geneva. That body realized the seriousness of the situation and finally cabled a request to the Liberian government to abandon its attitude as otherwise the League plan of assistance could not be made effective. In the meantime, the Finance Corporation, which had been accused of not heeding the appeal of Liberia for a modification of the loan agreement, informed the Liberian government that it desired to be of constructive help but could not do so as long as the repudiation legislation remained in force. It is stated that the Corporation, if given the opportunity, would have been willing to declare a moratorium as to the debt and materially reduce the interest agreed upon during the prosperous times of seven years ago. President Barclay declined to officially recognize the representative of the American corporation and herein is an illustration of how comparatively small incidents influence larger issues. When the Liberian Secretary of the Treasury called at the State Department in Washington he was told that the Liberian question had been transferred to Geneva. The resentment felt at this "discourtesy" was reflected in the

statement of the Liberian administration that Geneva and not Monrovia was the place where the details of the problem must be settled.

It must not be supposed that the revolutionary action of the Liberian government was taken without a warning from within its own personnel. The Attorney General and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court called attention to the fact that the repudiation of the agreement violated that section of the Liberian Constitution which provided "nor shall the legislature make any law impairing the obligation of contracts." These protests were like water on a duck's back. They were promptly overruled.

In thus defying the United States, the Liberian government evidently does not expect that an American warship will appear off Monrovia to protect American interests. Neither is there apparent fear of summary action by the League of Nations, for Lord Cecil has stated in the British House of Lords that the League has no machinery to enforce its mandates. Diplomatic representatives of foreign governments in Monrovia are reported to have been informed that the Liberian government will not undo its action, no matter what the League may say or do. Liberia is riding its high horse and nobody seems to interfere.

Liberia is so isolated from the rest of the world that during all this critical period no information has emanated from Monrovia, and the world is in ignorance, except for a few formal statements issued from the American State Department, and these do not convey a realization of the tense atmosphere prevailing. It is known, however, that significant events are happening in Monrovia, the facts of which are evidently deliberately suppressed. For instance, there have been posted on the streets several placards carrying a warning of death to any Justice of the Supreme Court who would dare to affirm the Attorney General's opinion that the resolution repudiating the loan agreement is unconstitutional and members of the Court have received similar warnings. Former President King, who was suspected of an intention to bring the question before the Court, was also threatened with death. An organization of young men, calling themselves "Cowboys," are said to have gone about Monrovia, shooting in the streets, and making threats against President Barclay's opponents.

Criticism of what the President may say or do is effectually muzzled by the recent passage of a so-called sedition law which, among other things, is directed against anyone "who shall write or speak in a disrespectful or defamatory manner of the incumbent of the Presidential office with intent in so doing to show disrespect to the Head of the State." The entire law is so unusual for a republican form of government that it deserves to be quoted in full, but suffice it to say that the penalty for violating any of its drastic provisions "shall be imprisonment for a period not exceeding seven years and not less than three years, and the confiscation of all property, real and personal, which the convicted person shall own or possess." The iron hand of the law is clamped upon every tongue.

In the meantime, the act of repudiation and in violation of the solemn agreement of the Liberian government, although challenged both by the United States and the League of Nations, has not been abrogated or disallowed. The legislature has adjourned without action.

Is this not a most remarkable, not to say sensational, chapter in the history of the two nations — and one the offspring of the other. Meanwhile what is to be the fate of a people who in 1847 proudly proclaimed their independence as a nation and have since enjoyed in undisputed fashion the rights and privileges of their own sovereignty? Are they to be carried down the stream of history in a maelstrom of European intrigue and thus robbed of their precious heritage? Also, what is to be the fate of American interests in Liberia? Persia came to terms when the British lion uttered a roar about the violation of the Anglo-Persian oil agreement. Evidently the United States does not roar loud enough.

V.

Liberia and Its Future

The fact that Liberia has defied the United States and is treating the League of Nations with the utmost indifference has a direct bearing upon the uncertainty of its future.

Between the United States and Liberia there is definite separation. Not only have diplomatic relations entirely ceased but there is not even unofficial intercourse. Between the two countries the Liberian government has erected a wall and it was in the hope that a breach might be made in this wall that President Hoover, just before the end of his term, sent Maj. Gen. Blanton Winship, judge advocate general of the army, to Monrovia, trusting that his visit might bring order out of chaos and eventuate in the restoration of a friendly status.

Why should Liberia, a weak and helpless nation, invite the antagonism of a country which has been its life-long guardian and aid?

The first answer to that question is the natural suspicion that the Liberian government is being unwisely guided to its own destruction by the selfish and sinister advice of some foreign nation. Unfortunately, there is ground for this suspicion. Somewhere, apparently, some power is hoping that Liberia will fall like a ripe plum into its lap. And Liberia is a ripe plum. It is possessed of valuable natural resources which have never been developed and which promise an abundance of riches to the nation that shall secure their control. The United States is not in this category. We have more than enough outlying territory in the Philippines, Guam, Hawaii, Porto Rico and the Virgin Islands. We are not land-grabbers. We even paid for the islands that came to us as the result of victory in the Spanish War. Other nations are less conscientious. At the end of the World War the Allies divided Germany's raiment among themselves.

It is reported that upon return from Geneva, the Liberian Secretary of State said he had documents guaranteeing support of certain European interests in case Liberia revoked the American

Loan Agreement, and that ample funds amounting to several millions would be supplied by a Danish syndicate, in return for which the latter was to be granted extensive mineral and other concessions and the right to build a road across the entire extent of Liberian territory from the coast to the French boundary. Already the President of the Republic has been authorized to negotiate the proposed concession. It is a most astounding surrender of natural rights and privileges. If it should go into effect the United States would undoubtedly enter a protest on the ground that American obligations should first be met, but as the protest would be nothing more than a multitude of words, it is natural to suppose that it would be as futile as the protests in the past. Up to the present time no Danish money has been actually in evidence but if the transaction should be concluded, there would be a sad and fatal farewell to American interests in Liberia.

Two great European powers have long looked with envious and desirous eyes upon Liberia. On the west is the British possession of Sierra Leone, and on the east is the French Ivory Coast. Liberia is between the upper and nether millstone and the wonder is that it still survives. Already, however, the little Republic has been despoiled of vast areas through the cupidity of its neighbors. Great Britain, upon the flimsiest pretext, stepped in and seized Liberian territory which it annexed to Sierra Leone and still retains, while France, on the specious plea of perfecting boundary lines, now occupies two thousand square miles of land which rightfully belongs to Liberia. This wholesale and unrighteous acquisition has not been accomplished without protest from the United States but verbal utterances are harmless ammunition with which to dislodge British and French supremacy. It would be most unfortunate, but it would not be surprising, if Liberia should some day lose its entirety but that this is not unlikely is evident when huge chunks can be successfully carved out of its territory on the theory that might makes right.

Although Lord Cecil has asserted in Geneva that Great Britain has no sinister designs upon Liberia and desires to see the sovereignty of the Republic preserved, the attitude of his government is far from reassuring.

In the first place, Great Britain has done many things which seem to indicate a purpose of placing Liberia in such an embarrass-

ing position that British interference would be justified. The Bank of British West Africa, which has branches all along the coast, withdrew from Monrovia on the ostensible plea of unhealthy conditions in 1930, and refused to remain even when guaranteed safety from loss and actual profit by an American corporation. This compelled the latter to open its own bank as there was no other financial institution in Liberia. A British subject named Davidson was placed at the head. Circumstances compelled his release in strict accordance with the terms of the written contract with him, and this action was accepted without protest at the time. Later, however, he entered suit for £50,000 against the American company for defamation of character, and although the case has been twice before the courts without redress in sight, he continues to be a thorn in the flesh of American interests. There are many rumors not altogether to the credit of the Liberian government in connection with this case—one, for instance, that a sealed verdict in favor of Davidson was in the hands of the jury when the trial began and only failed to become effective because the judge at the last minute declared a mistrial and thereby became a victim of governmental revenge—but it can be seen that even if Davidson is prosecuting the case of his own volition and is not inspired or financed by some ulterior agency, the prosecution is merely another endeavor to further stir up the already muddy waters.

A debate in the House of Lords in England not long ago throws some light upon Great Britain's attitude. All of the speakers stressed the continuance of objectionable conditions in Liberia, with questions as to how long these conditions were to be allowed. The indictment made by Lord Cecil against Liberia was in the strongest possible language. He declared that "the experiment which was started with the greatest enthusiasm seventy or eighty years ago has been a complete failure"; that the real trouble of Liberia is "the incompetence of the government and corruption—but incompetence rather more than corruption"; and that the loan designed for the best possible purposes had been squandered. "I think that the best thing, only it is not practicable or indeed thinkable at the moment," he said; "would be for some civilized country to take over the whole thing. It is really the only way in which the matter can be dealt with satisfactorily." Herein the wish is plainly the father to the thought. More than this, if there

should be a revolt among the Krus or any other of the tribes—as there has been in the past and seems likely to recur when the present truce with the Krus, negotiated by a Britisher transported to Liberia on a British warship, expires in the near future—Great Britain would not ask any better justification for forcibly restoring and assuring law and order. This was the course pursued when British forces invaded Liberian territory and annexed it to Sierra Leone.

If this should happen, and it is much more of a probability than a mere possibility, what will be the policy of the United States? Will we be content to see “the nation’s ward” become the victim of the strong arm of British intervention? Will the British contention, once expressed by Lord Cecil, that “disorderly nation cannot be allowed to exist contiguous to our borders,” be sufficient to quiet our protest? Will we undertake to protect the results of one hundred years of American endeavor and prevent the confiscation of a vast property which is inimical to British rubber interests? Will we reiterate all that has been said by American Secretaries of State in the past to the effect that any attempt at aggression upon Liberian territory is a matter of our national concern?

It may be said by the State Department that there is no necessity of crossing a bridge until it has been reached. Very true, but we are rapidly drawing nearer to the bridge. The trouble is that when the United States relinquished its interest in Liberia by transferring that interest to the League of Nations—when it abandoned a policy of direct relationship that had existed for more than a century—the future safety of the Republic was threatened even if its doom was not sealed. Anyone who has regarded Liberia with a friendly eye and sincerely desires to see its sovereignty preserved, must view the outlook with real anxiety.

Liberia needs money, initiative, progressiveness, efficient government. Monrovia, today, after nearly one hundred years, has no sewerage, no running water, no paved streets, no telephones, and only a few rather dim electric lights. It lacks harbor facilities and means of communication. There is practically only one road in the Republic and this is only about fifty miles long. The gasoline tax which would be ample to build and repair roads has been spent in other directions. Public education is feebly supported and the bulk of the teaching is dependent upon American missionary

effort. The years have been allowed to drift by without anything like substantial progress.

Can Liberia, then, be saved, and is it worth saving? The answer is emphatically in the affirmative. All that Liberia needs is a pilot competent to extricate her from her present perilous position amid shoals and rocks. An American pilot, insisted upon by the Department of State, could steer Liberia into a harbor of prosperity and security.

No one who has the best interests of Liberia sincerely at heart desires to see the abdication of the government and a dictatorship substituted. Such revolutionary outcome is not contemplated. On the contrary, an American Chief Advisor and the President of the Republic could and would harmoniously collaborate in instituting the reforms so desirable and so necessary. If this is not to be there will be two alternatives. Liberia will either go along in its own way until it finally disintegrates upon the sands of national bankruptcy or else some nation will lay a heavy hand upon it. In either case Liberia will cease to exist as a separate entity, an outcome which no friend of the Republic can anticipate without regret. It can save itself by repealing its repudiation legislation, negotiating on a new and satisfactory basis with its creditors, and appealing to the American government for an advisor to place it upon a stable foundation.

The remedy thus outlined for the present crisis is simple and effective. Its wisdom should impressively influence the present government of Liberia, upon whom the destiny of the Republic depends. With a budget carefully prepared and properly administered, with the finances honestly, economically and wisely collected and expended, and with the necessary reforms instituted, there is no reason why Liberia should not prosper and endure.

And this is a consummation devoutly to be wished.

